



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

## **Region Three Citizen's Advisory Committee FWP Region 3 – Bozeman December 5, 2013**

**CAC Attendees:** Cale Christiansen, Barb Cestero, Cyndy Andrus, Rick Arnold, Tom Helm, Mike Dailey, Rick Grady, David Gibson, Ken Sinay, Bill Mealer

**FWP Staff Present:** Pat Flowers, Andrea Jones, Travis Horton, Howard Burt, Jerry Walker, Paul Sihler

**Public:** Norm Bishop

Members arrived at 12:30 and had lunch with casual conversation.

### **Greetings, Introductions, Roundtable – Pat Flowers**

Pat introduced the meeting, the last for 2013. There are no pressing issues, so there will be presentations with summary statements on many issues. County Commissioners will be meeting with R3 staff on Monday. Statute language was modified last session, so this is to meet that requirement. Flowers regularly meets with Gallatin, Park, Jefferson Counties, others less frequently. Paul Sihler will be here later to talk about budget status and issues. May work on brainstorming on key issues at the end of this session if time allows.

Around the table introductions.

**David Gibson:** Time for updated org chart? Pat will follow up.

**Tom Helm:** Sees that new members get mileage, not aware previously that was available. Not a big deal. Pat says we can go back and make that right.

**Rick Arnold:** What are new FAS procedures? Wants one out of Twin Bridges on Big Hole. Also want to talk about Tom Milesnick selling his place. Lots of public money spent, what would happen if purchased by private entity who might deny access?

**Horton:** Future Fisheries does not always require public access. There should be a 20 year agreement in place for improvements made with grants.

**Joe Cohenour:** When will there be a biologist in Townsend?

**Burt:** Probably right around the first of the year the process will begin. Wants to discuss damage hunt in Boulder.

**Flowers:** We have had those for quite some time. Structured off game damage roster, explained how roster works as well as other approaches to game damage. Four or five landowners were involved, and they contacted us as they needed hunters. Management hunts are intended to deal with seasonal appearance of animals other than the general season.

**Burt:** Whitehall area game damage is ongoing. Landowners were happy with the hunt. Also talked about public comments on list serve.

Pat recognized Jerry Walker as Regional Parks Manager for the last 22 years.

Pat recognized departing members – LeRoy Mehring (9 years), Cyndy Andrus (9 years), Rick Arnold (9 years), Barb Cestero, and Joe Cohenour.

Touching on areas to be covered with Commissioners, will send briefing papers out when they are complete next week.

Howard Burt handed out end of season check station results. Pretty similar to last week. More success in early season with no conducive weather during the season. Hunter numbers are declining which is concerning.

**Joe Cohenour:** The Gallatin Check station didn't look open because of no visible vehicles, same with Silver City check station.

**Sinay:** Phone surveys quite effective. Augusta check station popular because there's information available for hunters and encourages them to stop.

**Burt:** Not all check stations have the ability to do as much outreach as others.

**Daily:** How do check station numbers compare to overall hunter survey success rates.

**Burt:** Over the years they've been fairly close, but check stations are more localized.

**Flowers:** Tried to project total harvest from check station base, phone surveys are much better measure of success. Have looked at alternatives such as mandatory reporting, effectiveness is much higher with calling than mandatory reporting. Pilot on mandatory reporting on Madison last 2 years with limited success.

**Burt:** Telephone survey much cheaper overall than mandatory reporting and easier on hunters.

**Dailey:** Used to have to turn in blood samples years ago, good way to force people to report success.

**Flowers:** was for brucellosis testing, no longer needed, hard to get a good sample.

Big Game season setting, going into biennial season setting process for 2014-15 seasons. Going to Commission next week. They then go for public review. January will be season setting meetings, 9 meetings in R3 plus others statewide. Comments at meetings or online. February Commission meeting will be final season setting for 14-15.

**Gibson:** Seasons haven't changed for years?

**Burt:** Some changes by district.

**Grady:** Has Saturday opening changed things?

**Burt:** Not a big change, no overwhelming positives or negatives.

**Sinay:** Data that regional biologists collect, is it based on seasonal flights?

**Burt:** Have spring and winter flights for most species. Surveys are part, check stations another part, part is social based on landowner tolerances, hunter input, harvest surveys, all wrapped up into seasonal quota adjustments. Biennial season structures every 2 years, but we can make yearly adjustments as needed. There is some lag, but that's why many factors are considered. "It's not rocket science, it's much harder".

**Dailey:** Shields Watershed, 393/315 changes, concern about mobility of elk to make two areas so hunters can hunt both.

**Burt:** Many tentative to discuss at those meetings.

**Cohenour:** When a HD is under objectives, might consider stopping youth hunters in those areas since they're not as accurate hunters.

**Burt:** PTHFV coming back based on corrections to more stringent criteria for certification. Not much push to do that at this point.

**Cohenour:** With objectives, is there a critical minimum population to cut off hunting?

**Burt:** Step-down approach based on objectives. Haven't ever flat-out closed an HD due to low populations.

**Cohenour:** Lifting Butte Helena designated mule deer buck areas?

**Burt:** Created mule deer buck areas.

**Cohenour:** Better than 4 point or beter area?

**Burt:** Depends on your definition of better. Less competition, older age deer in areas. Some have been around 10-15 years, so good sample of population. Mule deer survey came back people were okay with what there was now, but didn't want more restrictive regulations.

**Cohenour:** Talk last few years about setting season back a week, any talk statewide?

**Burt:** Good point, seems like annually the weather is coming later the last few years.

Wolves, today 96 wolves harvested statewide, 32 in R3. Trapping season starts 12/15 until 2/28. Hunting season ends 3/15. Hard to say where we'll end up, harvested 225 in 2013, about 100 through trapping. Not like to see big harvest jump. Bulk of harvest likely through trapping now that the big game season has ended. Individual limits up to 5 each.

**Gibson:** How many are multiple kills by one hunter.

**Sheppard:** A couple hunters got 2, not heard of anyone getting 3. Electronic calls legal for both wolves and coyotes.

**Sinay:** How have management control actions numbers been affected by hunting.

**Burt:** State doing no control, that's Wildlife Services. Interesting thing to look at. Depredations over time have gone down. Won't know that until end of year. Trapping classes – 3 were held, none to capacity compared to 9 the year before. Similar around the state, less demand.

**Sinay:** Wolf trapping classes all filled last year but couldn't get in. Trapping class attended in Butte, ethics were high with participants. Issue of incidental dogs being mistaken for wolves, FWP offered 3 in R3 this year. Classes well attended. Emphasis was on controlling your pets. 500 foot setbacks on designated trails, going to do a lot to give peace of mind to pet owners. Small percentage of traps that catch dogs, not a spike in incidents since wolf trapping began. A lot of attention is given to any dog caught in traps. No dogs caught in wolf traps have been killed. Wolf traps not a big concern overall. Most dogs caught were running at large, 4 out of 5. Most education time was spent avoiding beaver traps. Next statewide population estimate will be out in January.

Grizzly bears. Revised grizzly bear plan, out for public comment last fall. Public comment recently closed. Grizzly bears allowed in tolerated areas, management actions outside core areas. Can be removed with human conflict. Looking at potential delisting as well as USFWS. Decision notice due out early next year.

**Flowers:** Biggest change between plans revised how evaluating populations. Demographics are very complicated. Populations more conservative than mortalities. Big focus on what bears are using for food. Overturned delisting because more work needed to be done on food synthesis report. Bears opportunistic omnivores, bears doing well. FWP plan attached to delisting proposal from feds. Study team thoughts are that grizzly bear population is at or near carrying capacity. Threat to cubs highest with other bears, not humans or other factors. Conflicts down across GYE.

**Gibson:** Relation to black bear density?

**Flowers:** No. There are impacts, black bear harvests steady, no drastic decline in districts with both.

**Sinay:** Recruitment in cubs increasing in interior that exterior?

**Burt:** Not sure.

**Sinay:** In changing environment wouldn't bear distribution change?

**Burt:** Isn't sure if it's that or territorial situation. According to study team, core areas full. Doesn't appear to be holes in those areas.

**Sinay:** If productivity is going down then theoretically density will decline, expanding range. Man-caused mortality is declining. Howard, increasing population for a number of years, food standpoint is that bears weighing same as when other food sources were plentiful. Haven't seen extreme movements.

**Mealer:** Are there grizzly bears in Bridgers?

**Burt:** Never say never, not documented.

Brucellosis in elk. Neil Anderson in lab working on surveillance program. Focus to survey elk in different areas on edges of surveillance area to determine what's there. Going into Tobacco Roots and 311 and looking at sample of 100. Implant in pregnant cows, take sample near expelled transmitter to determine seropositive. Ongoing project, mostly federal funding. One more year there. Looking at HDs 317 and 560 in the future. Department of Livestock would like to see that continue. Problems with hunter blood kits were that many samples were unusable, expensive to produce. This much more targeted. How many elk collared -0—100 or so last year.

**Gibson:** What about other diseases such as cwd?

**Burt:** Not detected in MT at this time. Also collect suspicious deer and road kills. Over 9000 samples looking for cwd, not detected. EHD is naturally occurring transmitted by gnats, typically annual ended by hard frost. Central MT had harsh outbreak as did hi-line. Killed lots of deer. Very rare in md and antelope, almost never in elk, mostly occurs in whitetails. Actual bluetongue hits mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, and elk.

**Cohenour:** CWD found in Wyoming near feeding grounds, think that's what will bring it into MT. Also found in Canada 20 miles north of MT.

**Burt:** Moose mortality is many different disease including tick borne and arterial worm. Minnesota had it very bad, shutting down seasons. Warming climate may play a part. 2<sup>nd</sup> year of moose research project, looking at different mortality factors. CWD not detected in wild in MT, only isolated in game farm. Brucellosis report from Neil Anderson just out. Sand gnats source of bluetongue and EHD. Brucellosis management component, working on management recommendations mitigating brucellosis transmission. Recommendations included local working groups in affected areas. Paradise valley in crosshairs. Working to stop comingling of elk and cattle with fencing, March dispersal hunt during risk period in spring last year. Harvested 8 in Paradise Valley, harvested 3 in R5. Point not population control, more to move the elk away from cows. Elk are used to hazers, gun fire might be better solution. Need local groups in place. Working on groups in Madison and Ruby areas. Different solutions may work in different areas.

**Flowers:** Bison. Brucellosis in bison since 1900s. Managed in varying degrees since. In 1990s ,debate on management between Park and MT. Lawsuits resulted in statewide plan, interagency bison management plan. Still implementing, meeting 3-4 times per year. Remains controversial. Adaptive management changes in time. 5 iterations, sued on many, 7 active lawsuits last year. Proposed area on west side of YNP for greater bison tolerance. 118,000 comments on EIS. Content analysis ongoing. Decision between Flowers and Board of Livestock, not sure of result. Decision due January/February.

**Cohenour:** What about Livestock decision to vaccinate?

**Flowers:** Much ado about nothing. Current plan directs vaccination, hasn't happened since 2005. Some inside Park by Stevens Creek. State vet said reinstituting trapping and vaccination. Did agree, Department of Livestock has authority under current plan. RB51 at 20% or less success rate. Proposing more tags up to 40 on each side, changing to 2 hunt periods.

**Mealer:** Still not very many.

**Burt:** Still consider tribal harvest and being conservative. Previous EA limited us to 25 hunters, but limitation has lifted.

Bighorn sheep. EA out for transport to Indian creek transplant. December 10 commission agenda item. Looking at moving sheep in February from Taylor Hillgard to Indian or Wolf Creek. Overpopulated in originating area, would like to move some out of there. Bridgers sheep also to go in front of Commission. Landowner mitigations to be agreed to for sheep transplant. No opposition but sheep ranchers not willing to do mitigation measures. Commission will likely not approve at our recommendation. Extremely risky transplant. Concerned about natural movement to that area. Kicking off sheep auction dollars for management and research on disease profiles in various herds. Bob Garrott looking at 16 herds with radio collars, body condition. Capturing starting December 18. Herds will be in various areas statewide in Regions 1-3. 5-10 year study. Similar to moose effort. Hoppe herd concerns, talking to him today. Options limited, private land. Protocols include lethally removing affected animals. Sheep have been moved to another pasture near Gardiner, talking about other mitigations. Lambs and ewes coughing in area, but this was seen prior to Hoppe bringing his sheep in. Native herds, not transplanted in. Big Sky lambs also coughing. Good herd production. Radersberg sheep? Not doing well, poor survival and recruitment.

Feeling for mule deer population in association with elk decline? Some areas, yes. Some in Shields have had high populations up to game damage levels. Been down low for many years, production seems to be increasing slowly. Numbers and sizes of mule deer bucks best in quite a while. Good weather conditions for antler growth.

#### **Paul Sihler presented budget summary and current status**

##### **Fisheries Issues:**

Arctic grayling, pending listing decision. 20 year history of Endangered Species Act, similar to wolverines. Collecting info, decision by next September. Issues – money not there, create red tape for regulating agencies, doing what can be done at this point, centennial population highest in 60 year recorded history, Big Hole duplicated into Ruby, recruitment looking good. Water rights will be an important issue. No mechanism for western water management. Can't prevent someone from taking grayling.

Upper Missouri basin closed to new acquisitions of water rights except storage of excess runoff or adding a well. Ground water connected to surface water, will likely affect flows and senior water holders. Already having very tough time in lean years, wells are only going to make it worse. Need to have limits on what constitutes a beneficial use (ponds may not qualify). State water planning board has a FWP representative. Do golf courses impact, likely have existing water rights, would need to look at specifics. Old water rights on canals have caveats that it must go to agricultural purposes on Shields River. Missouri closed to new rights for a reason, not enough water to satisfy any more. On fountains and waterfalls there is an evaporation

issue. Lots of golf courses have shifted to gray water instead of new water. Wells are the life blood of any new development in counties. Prime example of working around is Galactic Park that pulled a very deep well. Commissioners are going to be resistant because they want that development. Not saying allowing wells for household wells, but should there be a limitation on what its used for.

### **Jerry Walker, Parks –**

Parks Division Administrative Regions differ from Fish & Wildlife Regions

R3 is Southwestern Region

- Parks in Anaconda Area (Lost Creek, Anaconda Stack and Granite)
- Parks in Sweetgrass and Carbon Counties (Grey Cliff Prairie Dog Town & Cooney Reservoir)
- Parks in Helena Area (Spring Meadow Lake, Black Sandy [Hauser Reservoir], and Elkhorn) are administered by R4 (Great Falls).

54 units statewide in Montana State Park System

- Largest number of units of the western states
- Budget is the smallest of the western states, except ND (which has the smallest number of units at 22)

11 units administered in Southwestern Region – in Gallatin, Jefferson, Madison, Beaverhead, Deerlodge, Granite, Sweetgrass and Carbon counties.

Gallatin: Missouri Headwaters & Madison Buffalo Jump

Jefferson: Lewis & Clark Caverns

Madison: Beaverhead Rock

Beaverhead: Bannack & Clark's Lookout

Deerlodge: Lost Creek & Anaconda Stack

Granite: Granite

Sweetgrass: Grey Cliff Prairie Dog Town

Carbon: Cooney

The Parks Division no longer has responsibility for fishing access sites. That program went to the Fisheries Division in 2011.

What can you do in Southwestern Montana state parks:

- See natural geologic wonders
- Experience rich Native American culture
- Learn about mining and territorial history
- Explore areas authentic to Lewis & Clark
- Enjoy camping, hiking, fishing
- Waterskiing, boating, swimming, tubing, floating



- Participate in a wide range of special events

2014 will be the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the creation of state parks in Montana

Innovation: We are not sitting on the sidelines, we are innovating to more effectively reach out to the public and stay strong and relevant with such things as:

- Online campground reservation program
- Park Warden Program
- AmeriCorps
- Field Schools for archaeological field work established with MSU and UM
- Distance learning classroom pilot project
- Made in Montana – GK- beef jerky

Montana State Parks are about:

- Family
- Community
- Economy

Economic Engine for Local Communities:

- **We will likely surpass 2 million visitors to Montana State Parks this year.**
- **Had our highest peak season visitation on record in 2013. Up 5% over 2011.**
- **\$289 million dollars generated/yr. by resident and non-resident park visitors for local and state economies**
- **Creating 1600 jobs/yr. in tourism-related areas (grocery stores, gas stations, hotels, restaurants, retail, more)**

Community:

- **20,438 students participated in educational programs presented and hosted by Parks Division Staff (2012)**
- **More than 1,519 volunteers in 2012**
- **More than 41,965 hours of service (equals 20 FTE)**
- **14% increase over 2011**

Funding:

- Annual budget is \$8.1 M; this is 9% of the agency budget of \$81.9 M
- State Parks receives no hunting or fishing license dollars
- State Parks receives no general funds
- State parks has a variety of funding sources, the top three of which are:
  - Vehicle registration fee (\$6 per light vehicle of which the majority goes to state parks with smaller portions going to the Fishing Access Site program and to Virginia/Nevada cities)
  - Earned revenue (fees from camping, non-resident day use, commercial use and group use permits, etc.)

- Bed Tax revenues

#### Vehicle Registration Fee

- Important State Park funding source
- Compliance rates have stayed in the 75-80% range for past few years
- Last quarter through September statewide compliance was 77%
  - Gallatin County 91%
  - Beaverhead County 86%
  - Madison County 53%
  - Jefferson County 48%
- In 2010: For every \$1 vehicle registration dollar spent = \$8 dollars for Montana's local and state economies

#### State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

- The Land and Water Conservation Act of 1965 (LWCF) provides matching grants to States and local governments for the acquisition and development of community outdoor recreation areas and facilities, as well as funding for federal land acquisition and conservation strategies.
- As a requirement to be eligible to receive state side funds, each state must prepare a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) every five years.
- The plan provides strategic recommendations to help maintain outdoor recreation as a priority in Montana because it benefits the quality of life for Montanans, and helps sustain economic vitality of our communities.
- This statewide draft plan was developed through a collaborative process with an advisory committee representing federal, state, and local recreation managers, and tourism partners, along with public surveys of Montana residents by the University of Montana *Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research* and additional national and state agency data collection.
- Today, Montana receives approximately \$300,000 in federal funding per year for local community grants.
- Since 1965, Montana has received close to \$38 million in LWCF state side appropriations.

#### State Park News and Improvement Projects

- Bannack
  - Flash flood on July 17
  - Park was closed until September 9
  - Bannack Days was cancelled
  - National Restoration Firm was hired to repair and clean-up (approx. cost \$2.5 M)
- Lewis & Clark Caverns
  - Water system improvements (\$472,609)
  - Cave lighting improvement (\$20,000)

- Candlelight Tours; Dec. 14 & 15, Dec. 21 & 22 and Dec. 27, 28 & 29. Call now to secure reservations
- Missouri Headwaters
  - Picnic area parking lot repaved
  - Legacy Trail within park paved
- Madison Buffalo Jump
  - Proposal to cease operating as state park and turn over to DNRC
  - After overwhelming public opposition to proposal decision was made to retain management authority
  - Friends group
- Cooney
  - Campground expansion project – added 7 pull through sites and three group camping sites

#### Weed Control Efforts

- Have greatly expanded our in-house chemical application capabilities the past three years. Integrated pest management approach; chemical, biological & mechanical
- Continue to utilize County crews and private applicators
- 2013 –Region wide \$15,000
- Have agreements signed with Gallatin, Beaverhead, Madison, Jefferson, Deerlodge, Carbon counties
- Working closely with county weed supervisors and keep them apprised of what we are doing and request their input and evaluation of our efforts
- Lewis & Clark Cavern:
  - Significant effort at this large acreage park. Focused on knapweed, houndstongue, thistle, with primarily backpacks and ATV spray unit
  - Focused on remote areas of park and treated approximately 15 acres
- Missouri Headwaters:
  - focused on leafy spurge; biological release of Aphthona beetles
- Bannack:
  - Utilized Basic Biological Services for main weed control efforts. The cost was \$3,000. Also utilized staff to apply Milestone/Chaparral in close proximity to Grasshopper Creek for knapweed , henbane, houndstongue and thistle.
- Lost Creek:
  - focused on large knapweed infestation
- Cooney:
  - Carbon County did \$3,100 worth of chemical application at park for primarily knapweed and thistle
- Prairie Dog Town
  - Sweetgrass County –performed \$100 worth of chemical treatment

#### State Park Marketing Efforts

- New State Park website – [www.stateparks.mt.gov](http://www.stateparks.mt.gov)

- Utilizing social media sites, Facebook, Twitter, and You Tube as well as traditional media; TV, radio, newspapers
- State Park mobile phone application

**2014 Meeting Schedule:**

February 27

May 15

August 14

December 4